



SENATOR

Mary Margaret Haugen

E-Newsletter - 10th District

[Web Site](#) | [Contact me](#) | [About the Legislature](#)

10th Legislative District

February 13, 2009

### **2009 LEGISLATURE — WEEK FIVE**

There's so much going on in the Legislature that it's a challenge to keep up with everything and decide on what to tell you about, but our staff has been working hard to make it easier than ever to find out for yourself.

One new on-line tool that's available is our Hot Topics" webpage that lists the big issues that will be heard in committees each week. You can visit it weekly at <http://blog.senatedemocrats.wa.gov/hot-topics/>

In the meantime, here are a few things that I'd like to fill you in on myself — including an important warning from the FBI.

### **SCAM ALERT: IT'S NOT REALLY JURY DUTY**

The FBI is sounding the alarm on an identity-theft scam that has yet to be reported in Washington but has surfaced in 11 states so far and is spreading fast.

The caller claims to be a jury coordinator and warns that an arrest warrant has been issued in your name for failing to answer a summons to jury duty.

When you explain that you never received a summons, the caller asks for your Social Security number and date of birth to verify your identity and cancel the arrest warrant. What they really want, of course, is your personal information.

This is a very effective scam that is worth alerting to friends and family, along with a good rule of thumb: **never divulge personal information to a stranger.**

More information on this scam is available [here](#).

### **HELPING SMALL BUSINESSES CREATE JOBS**

Even though the economy is tough, there's actually been an increase in people getting business licenses. That's good news, which is why I've been supporting an idea to provide entrepreneurs with some tax relief so that they can help create jobs and grow our economy.

This week, the Senate unanimously approved [Senate Bill 5899](#) to create a two-tiered program to provide a Business and Occupations (B&O) tax credit to businesses with 10 employees or less.

An eligible business that creates new jobs with wages and benefits of between 150 percent of minimum wage and \$40,000 would get a \$2,000 credit against their B&O taxes owed. Businesses that create new employment positions with wages & benefits over \$40,000 would get a \$4,000 credit.

Hiring new workers is a big commitment, especially for smaller businesses, and I think this bill is a great way to help them to provide more jobs our state.

### **PUTTING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TO WORK**

Our state has an unemployment insurance program that is one of the best managed and well funded in the nation, and this week my colleagues and I passed legislation aimed at putting those funds to work.

[House Bill 1906](#) temporarily increases weekly unemployment benefits by \$45 and expands eligibility for a preexisting program that provides worker retraining and unemployment benefits to workers whose hours have been reduced.

This provides money for families that are struggling to pay their mortgages and feed their families, and it also focuses on helping to provide the funding necessary to help unemployed or underemployed people get the training necessary to help them find new jobs.

### **CONDO ASSOCIATIONS**

Condominium associations are required to conduct reserve studies and update them annually, but these studies are not required if preparing them would present an unreasonable hardship.

Under current law, these studies are automatically considered an unreasonable hardship if it would cost more than 10 percent of the association's annual budget, but proving this is time consuming and could cost the association money to provide the information necessary to receive a waiver.

This week, I sponsored [Senate Bill 5461](#) at the request of one of the small condominium associations in our district to provide an automatic waiver for condominium associations consisting of 10 or fewer units, since these associations are so small that the requirement is virtually guaranteed to meet the existing threshold of an unreasonable hardship.

It's a simple "cost nothing/do something" idea to cut red tape so that citizens don't have to jump through hoops to apply for something that common sense says should be automatic.

### **REFORMING GOVERNMENT**

This week the Governor released a proposal for long-term reform of our state government. She has several ideas to improve how the state approaches the way it delivers services to our citizens, including:

- ✍ **Cutting red tape.** One way to do this is to eliminate a third of the 470 boards and commissions which sometimes actually make it harder for us to do the people's business.
- ✍ **Deliver 21<sup>st</sup> Century customer service.** We need to expand the use of technology to ensure our people have access to 24/7 options for daily business transactions with state government.

- ✍ **Streamline government operations.** We can eliminate outdated programs, close under-used offices, and consolidate similar functions that are being done by different state agencies

You can see the details of her proposal yourself at [www.governor.wa.gov/priorities/reform/](http://www.governor.wa.gov/priorities/reform/)

### **EARLY SAVINGS BILLS**

Both the House and Senate approved each other's proposals to make immediate cuts to the state budget on Friday after making minor changes. Combined, they would bolster the state's bottom line during the current two-year budget cycle that ends June 30 by \$735 million. They both could be signed into law by Gov. Chris Gregoire as early as Wednesday. Both have received bipartisan support.

[Senate Bill 5460](#) and [House Bill 1694](#) trim agency administrative budgets, extend the state hiring freeze, freeze equipment purchases over \$5,000 and freeze salaries for the state's exempt and management employees. The package also seeks to maximize federal funds, capture unspent money by state agencies and universities and cut spending.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS INCREASE**

Over 250,000 people are unemployed in our state. A record-setting 90,331 new applications for unemployment benefits were filed in December, and the state's unemployment rate has topped 7 percent — the highest it's been since the dot-com collapse.

This week the Senate approved [a measure](#) to increase [weekly unemployment benefits by \\$45](#) to directly and quickly help our citizens who have lost their jobs. The measure also expands our state's Shared Work Program which will reduce job cuts and help keep the paychecks of workers whose hours have been reduced dependable and consistent.

An extra \$180 a month will now be placed into the pockets of our citizens who need it the most. This extra money will help those who are unemployed to not have to choose between paying their heating bill or their mortgage payment.

Although the Governor is expected to sign the measure on Monday, the changes to computer programming needed to implement the increase means the extra benefits will not begin until May.

### **BUSINESS CLIMATE SOLUTIONS**

Unemployed workers had a major victory this week, and the Senate will soon turn our attention to the businesses across our states who are also suffering from this recession.

We'll be approving [legislation](#) brought forth by the business community which addresses long-term business climate issues. The legislation will bring our Unemployment Insurance laws into conformity with federal laws which will, in most cases, reduce employers' unemployment insurance tax rates.



### **VISITORS**

Each week I like to give a little extra attention to someone who visits me in Olympia, and this week I had a very impressive young man participating in the Senate Page Program whom I'd like to tell you about.

Christopher Biting of Coupeville is an Eagle Scout whose project to raise \$5,000 to pay for automatic defibrillators for the Coupeville School District schools was featured in our local newspapers.

This week the Boy Scouts of Washington presented their annual report to the Legislature, and the Lt. Governor gave a special mention to the Senate about Christopher's great accomplishment. You can see that on my website at:

<http://blog.senatedemocrats.wa.gov/haugen/local-eagle-scout-gets-a-shout-out-in-the-senate/>.

Christopher was also chosen from his fellow pages to carry the United States Flag into the Senate Chambers when the Senate convened this morning.

### **WE'RE HERE TO HELP**

My executive assistant Nova Gattman, legislative assistant Gina Bull and intern Beau Perschbacher are available to provide constituent services to the people of our community, so please feel free to contact us with questions or concerns—whether they involve bills before the Legislature or topics you feel are being overlooked.

You can reach me by [e-mail](#) or call my office in Olympia at **360-786-7618**. If you have a concern, I want to hear it.

In the meantime, please visit my [web page](#) for up-to-date info on what's happening at the Legislature. I post regular updates — including video — onto my blog, and it's far more information than we'd want to put into a weekly update like this.

Until next week — Take Care!

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.

**Washington Senate Democratic Caucus**